

R.E.C.H.A.R.G.E.

Recharging your batteries is one of the most important ways to help your loved one.

R: REST. One of the most important things you can do for the person you are caring for is to take care of yourself. If you wear yourself out, going 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you risk burnout.

E: EAT RIGHT. Eat healthy as often as possible. You don't have to adhere to a strict diet, but eating a well balanced diet keeps you healthy and increases your energy level.

C: COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS TO OTHERS. Don't expect anyone, even other family members, to read your mind about what you need or what your loved one needs. Let people around you know the things that need to be done and that occasionally you can use a hand.

H: HYDRATE. Drink lots of water. Water hydrates your body and keeps you energized. Take vitamins if you don't get enough nutrition from your food.

A: ACCEPT HELP. This can be one of the hardest things to do, but it's one of the best things you can do for your loved one and for yourself. When people offer to help, often caregivers turn them down because they don't want to burden them. You don't have to do everything yourself. When you have a few moments, really think about the kinds of things that will make life a little easier. Then when people ask how they can help, you'll be ready. When you tell someone something very specific, they're more comfortable doing it, and you'll get the help you need. Helping makes people feel good about themselves. Don't deprive anyone of that joy.

R: RESPITE. Make a point of getting away sometimes for a mini-respite. A movie, lunch out, window shopping or just walking along the beach or through a park can be enough to get some distance, and come back with a fresh perspective on things.

G: GET ENOUGH SLEEP. This is often the hardest one to manage because you're on someone else's schedule. Sleep is one of the best things you can do for yourself. Eight hours are ideal, but getting eight uninterrupted hours of sleep might be impossible. Get what you can in one shot, but take a nap during the day. A short nap can be very refreshing and just the thing you need to get you through the day.

E: EXERCISE. Anything will help. Walk around the block a few times a day when you have a few spare minutes. Try yoga, something that will exercise your muscles, yet relax your mind. Meditate. Spend a few minutes alone and quiet.